

# UNCLASSIFIED Department of State

INCOMING  
TELEGRAM

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ACTION 10-15

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INFO OCT-01 ARA-11 ISO-08 QES-03 PA-01 ICAE-00 AID-05  
SS-15 SP-02 L-03 HA-05 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00  
NSCE-00 OIC-02 AF-10 EA-10 EUR-12 NEA-07 MCT-02  
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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9139

BUENOS AIRES 0503

E.O. 12065 GDS 1-19-85 (THAYER, IVONNE) OR-P  
TAGS SHUM, PINS, PINT, AR  
SUBJECT INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTIC FREEDOM

REF: A STATE003302; B BUENOS-AIRES 0436

## ENTIRE TEXT)

SUMMARY: EMBASSY PRESENTED USG POSITION ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO FOREIGN MINISTRY AS AIDE MEMOIRE, FOLLOWING UP ON OUR EXTENSIVE LOBBYING AND PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN ON PRESS FREEDOM DURING THE UNESCO CONFERENCE. IN GENERAL TERMS, CONSIDERABLE PRESS FREEDOM IS ROUTINELY ACCORDED TO FOREIGN NEWSMEN IN ARGENTINA. THE LOCAL PRESS, HOWEVER, IS SUBJECTED TO "SELF-RESTRAINT" IN NEWS AND EDITORIAL COVERAGE AND AFFLICTED BY PERIODIC HARASSMENT AND EVEN DISAPPEARANCE OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED HARASSMENT OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS IS DUE MORE TO THEIR SUSPECTED LEFTIST AND/OR POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND LESS TO THEIR PURELY JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITIES. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS PRESENTED THE USG POSITION ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AS OUTLINED IN REFTEL A IN AN AIDE MEMOIRE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. EMBASSY EXTENSIVELY LOBBIED FOR AND PUBLICIZED THE US POSITION WITH KEY GOVERNMENT AND PRESS REPRESENTATIVES BEFORE AND DURING THE UNESCO CONFERENCE. THE GOA ATTITUDE AND MEDIA COMMENTARY SUPPORTED OUR POSITION ON THE MEDIA DECLARATION. THE EMBASSY WILL ENSURE THAT OUR POSITION IS INCORPORATED IN THE "FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION" SEMINAR SCHEDULED FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR AND WILL CONTINUE TO STRESS THE POLICY WITH APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT AND PRESS CONTACTS.

2. AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ARE NOT IMPEDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA IN CARRYING OUT THEIR NORMAL PROFESSIONAL DUTIES. TRAVEL, WORKING DOCUMENTS, ACCESS TO SOURCES, IMPORTATION OF TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT (ACKNOWLEDGING ROUTINE BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS OF UP TO SIX WEEKS FOR FILM), AND TRANSMISSION ARE ALL ROUTINELY FACILITATED FOR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS. FOREIGN PRESS REPORTS ARE NO LONGER SUBJECTED TO GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL FOREIGN JOURNALISTS -- THE LATEST BEING FRENCH LE MONDE CORRESPONDENT LEVI WHO WAS INTERROGATED FOR SEVERAL HOURS UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN BUENOS AIRES TO COVER THE WORLD CUP SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP IN JUNE -- EMBASSY HAS LEARNED OF NO MORE RECENT REPORTS. ONE CHILEAN JOURNALIST LONG RESIDENT IN ARGENTINA WAS DETAINED INCOMMUNICADO FOR MORE THAN A WEEK IN SALTA PROVINCE BUT HIS CASE IS BELIEVED TO BE CONNECTED TO INTIMIDATION OF CHILEANS ARISING OUT OF THE BEAGLE CHANNEL CONFLICT.

3. IF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS ARE RELATIVELY FREE FROM CENSORSHIP OR HARASSMENT, THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR LOCAL JOURNALISTS. ADEPA, THE ARGENTINE ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPER OWNERS WHICH ACTS AS A SELF-APPOINTED WATCHDOG ON PRESS FREEDOM, CONCLUDED IN ITS MID-1978 REPORT THAT ARGENTINA DOES NOT ENJOY A FREE PRESS. IT ALSO CONDEMNED

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MORE THAN 50 JOURNALISTS REPORTEDLY DISAPPEARED OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS OR SO.

4. TREATMENT OF THE LOCAL MEDIA AND CORRESPONDENTS IS VARIABLE AND COLORED BY COMPLEX POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL OVERTONES. THE LOCAL PRESS EXERCISES SELF-RESTRAINT IN PUBLISHING NEWS OR OPINIONS WHICH MAY ANGER THE GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH OPPOSITION PRESS WITH POWERFUL -- OFTEN TIMES MILITARY -- BACKING TAKES CONSIDERABLE LICENSE WHERE IT FEELS SAFE TO DO SO. THE GOVERNMENT FREQUENTLY DICTATES A NEWS BLACKOUT ON CERTAIN EVENTS OR SUBJECTS, SUCH AS TERRORISM, AND ROUTINELY USES COMPLAINT MEDIA TO EXPRESS OFFICIAL OPINIONS OR FLOAT TRIAL BALLOONS AND GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA.

5. OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO "LEADS" OR CRITICISM IS INCONSISTENT, HOWEVER. IT CAN VARY FROM A MERE REMINDER TO A COSTLY IMPOSED SHUTDOWN FOR UP TO A WEEK. LATELY THE GOVERNMENT HAS OUTDONE ITSELF IN EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY WITH THE PRESS AND EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE (READ COOPERATIVE) PRESS. AT THE OTHER, MORE EXTREME END, IN THE CASE OF LA OPINION, THE GOVERNMENT HAS DETAINED EDITOR JACCO TIMMERMAN FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS WITHOUT SUBSTANTIATING VARIOUS ECONOMIC AND TERRORIST INSINUATIONS AGAINST HIM AND TOOK EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF HIS NEWSPAPER. (ARMY INTERVENTION OF THE PAPER HOWEVER ENDED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO AND LA OPINION APPEARS TO BE BACK IN PRIVATE HANDS.)

6. HARASSMENT AND DISAPPEARANCES OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS OFTEN FALLS INTO THAT CLOUDY GREY AREA OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE, MILITARY RIVALRY, AND ALLEGED IDEOLOGICAL "IMPURITY" SO CURRENT IN ARGENTINE SOCIETY. FREQUENTLY DISAPPEARANCES APPEAR TO BE CONNECTED NOT SO MUCH TO THE VICTIM'S REPORTING AS TO HIS CONTACTS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND POLITICS. THE RECENT WEEK LONG DISAPPEARANCE OF LA SEMANA EDITOR JORGE FONTEVECCIA (WHO REAPPEARED WITHOUT EXPLANATION ON JANUARY 11) WAS VARIOUSLY RUMORED TO BE A KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM, A WARNING FOR PUBLISHING PRO-GUERRILLA OR OTHER "UNACCEPTABLE" STORIES, OR AN ATTACK AGAINST GOVERNMENT CRITIC AND CHALLENGER ADMIRAL MASSERA (SEE REFTEL B). WHATEVER THE MOTIVE, THE FREQUENCY OF SUCH EVENTS HELPS TO KEEP JOURNALISTS CAUTIOUS AND IN LINE.

7. WE NOT THE ABOVE DISTINCTION IN TREATMENT OF FOREIGN AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 11 OF REFTEL A, IN WHICH IT APPEARS LEGISLATION IS DIRECTED AT TREATMENT OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. GOA TREATMENT OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IS CORRECT AND WE BELIEVE DOES NOT NECESSITATE FURTHER BILATERAL DEMARCHES BEYOND OUR DISSEMINATED STATEMENT OF US POLICY. FOREIGN NEWS CORRESPONDENTS ARE NOT SUBJECTED TO HARASSMENT AND RESTRICTIONS THAT WOULD SERIOUSLY RESTRICT THEIR ACCESS AND REPORTING, A SITUATION NOT FULLY ENJOYED BY LOCAL ARGENTINE JOURNALISTS. WE HAVE NOTICED IN RECENT MONTHS, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TOLERATING INCREASINGLY FORCEFUL EDITORIALS AND COLUMNS CALLING FOR A RETURN TO THE RULE OF LAW AND SUPPRESSION OF KIDNAP EXECUTION SQUADS.

CASTRO

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part (X) In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

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